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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 001447

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [JO](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: UNEASE IN JORDAN OVER LEBANON

REF: AMMAN 1430

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Jordanian officials have reacted to the latest outbreak of violence in Lebanon with consternation and with a strong statement of support for the legitimate government of Lebanon. They have urged the U.S. to take a more active role in de-escalating the crisis and are ramping up their own bilateral efforts (focusing on the Egyptians and Saudis) to outflank what they agree is the overly tepid and consensus-bound Arab League. Being contemplated are ideas ranging from further isolating Syria, seeking a UN Security Council Resolution condemning Hizballah, and introducing an Arab multi-national force to Beirut. The local media has vigorously denounced Hizballah, with commentators concerned about the conflict's sectarian undertones and what they perceive as an Iranian power grab. Embassy contacts lament what they characterize as the lack of a strong U.S. and international response, and worry about the regional consequences. End Summary.

Official Jordan Worried, Talks Tough, Casts About

13. (C) On May 10, in separate meetings with the Ambassador, both Prime Minister Nader Dahabi and Foreign Minister Salaheddin al-Bashir urged an active U.S. role and appeared to lack confidence that the Arab states would have the wherewithal to address the situation. Bashir, dispatched to Cairo on May 10 to discuss the crisis with Arab foreign ministers, worried that the Iranians "triumph(ed)" in the Gaza Strip and now were winning in West Beirut (reftel).

14. (C) As Arab League deliberations continued in Cairo on Sunday, FM Bashir reported by phone to Royal Court Chief Bassem Awadallah (with the Ambassador at the time) that only seven of Arab states supported an "OK" resolution that condemned military action by non-state actors, supported the Lebanese Armed Forces and the government, and called for calm. In support were Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Bahrain, and Kuwait. He held Qatar, Oman, Libya, and Syria to blame for the mildness of the Arab League statement. Bashir did take some satisfaction from the fact that Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim was stymied in his effort to dominate Arab League follow up action, and was trapped by the relatively balanced composition of the follow up committee, which will travel together to Beirut soon.

15. (C) In conversations with Ambassador, the Jordanian leadership has expressed the need for more focused work among moderates, unimpeded by the Arab League consensus rules. Per Awadallah, the King believes that if the Iranians are not confronted now, "we will be fighting Hamas in Egypt and Jordan next." The Saudis have solicited Jordanian ideas focusing on how to get like-minded Arabs to withdraw Ambassadors from Damascus, introduce an Arab multi-national force in Beirut, and apply real pressure on Syria. Jordan also would like to see UNSC action condemning Hizballah and

strong U.S. leadership, but no U.S. saber-rattling yet. Awadallah returned to a theme we have heard before that the only way to pull the rug out from under Hizballah was for Israel to hand the Sheba'a Farms over to Lebanon (a notion we have tried to disabuse the GOJ leadership of). The King is sending Awadallah to see Saudi King Abdullah on May 12, after consulting with the Egyptians (Awadallah had been set to leave yesterday, but was delayed).

Media Slams Hizballah, Notes Effect on Jordanian Opinion

¶16. (SBU) Official comment to the media has been supportive of Siniora's government but balanced to reflect popular desires for a consensus solution. A statement released May 9 by Jordan's official news agency stated that "Jordan reiterates its support for Lebanese legitimate government and its constitutional institutions and calls on all parties to invoke the legitimate authority of the Lebanese state because ignoring it will only lead to more violence and chaos." After a telephone discussion the same day between King Abdullah and the Saudi ruler, the Royal Court released another statement noting both leaders "expressed their deep concern over the repercussion of these horrific events on the future of Lebanon and its people." The Jordanian King also added that all political powers must work together to restore calm, and that Jordan supported Arab League efforts to resolve the crisis.

¶17. (SBU) Local press has been more explicit in its public anger at Hizballah's actions. Al-Rai columnist Salih al-Qallab sarcastically praised Hizballah for its victory,

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comparing it to the Amal Movement's "victory" in its attacks on Palestinian camps during the Lebanese Civil War. He went on to voice alarm at the Sunni-Shia sectarian undercurrents in the latest conflict. This point was also taken up by Jordan Times columnist Musa Keilani who reminded readers of the prescience of King Abdullah's "Shia Crescent" warnings. A common thread in the commentaries is condemnation of Hizballah for greenlighting further Iranian involvement in Lebanon: Al-Ghad writer Ayman al-Safadi, for example, claimed Hizballah "offered (Lebanon) as prey to Iran."

¶18. (SBU) The Dubai-based Al-Arabiya satellite channel's Amman correspondent reports that Hizballah's popularity in Jordan has declined even further because of the latest developments. According to the reporter, Hizballah's use of arms inside Lebanon "surprised the majority of Jordanians - those who not long ago supported the party and Nasrallah as they were resisting the Israeli occupation." Not unexpectedly, according to a variety of press reports, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and a group of several dozen other Jordanian figures (including five former Ministers) sent a message of support to Hassan Nasrallah and his ally Michel Aoun, hailing their stands and considering them part of the resistance against the "U.S.-Zionist plan" under Nasrallah's leadership. Comment: The IAF's ideologically-driven indifference to the public mood is part of a pattern of behavior that has probably contributed to its diminishing base of popular support in Jordan. End Comment.

¶19. (C) General Intelligence Department Director Muhammad Dahabi offered a cautionary note, however. He told Ambassador and S/I Satterfield on May 12 that one Amman preacher used his Friday sermon to denounce Hizballah, but was shouted down by his worshippers. Dahabi is using this example to slow down the King's instinctive desire to embrace Siniora.

Contacts Fear Emboldened Hizballah, See U.S. Action as Key

¶10. (C) Dr. Faisal Al-Rfouh, who held several ministerial positions in previous governments and is now Deputy Dean of

the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Jordan and Chairman of the Political Science Department, said the crisis in Lebanon gives Jordanians pause in the absence of a forceful U.S. reaction. "How can I trust U.S. policy when I see you abandoning allies," he said, referring to the March 14 movement. "It makes me nervous." Rfouh blamed the U.S. for not enforcing UNSCR 1559's call for the disarmament groups like Hizballah. "Iran will one day be on the beach, bordering Israel," he said as a way to urge the U.S. to do more. Rfouh added that among his students - who tend to be more conspiracy-minded than himself, a self-described "pro-American" - also cannot fathom how Hizballah has been allowed to gain so much strength. Some argue there must be an "unwritten agreement between Iran, Israel, and the U.S." given our perceived silence (and inaction). "Neither Israel nor the U.S. has moved," he concluded, connecting the developments in Lebanon with U.S. policy in Iraq, which he said should be oriented toward establishing a stable Sunni-led government, not the Shia-led one that holds sway.

¶11. (C) MP Hani Nawafleh, a young, business-oriented modernizer, advocates going through the motions of pressuring Syria, and even trying to strengthen the Lebanese Army. Yet in the end, "Hizballah is the main problem, and they need to be taken out." U.S. military action would be "too hard," he judged, and further Israeli action would be unacceptable. Instead military action should take place "under the Arab umbrella." Still, even that would require the U.S. forcing the Arabs to act: "if the superpower says 'do it,' they will do it. The boss is the boss." For Nawafleh, the consequences of inaction in Lebanon are dire. Between the rising cost of living, unemployment, and other political strife, "the street is boiling" and Lebanon is adding more fuel to the fire; the ultimate result could be a wave of revolutions throughout the Middle East that produce "ten Saddam Husseins."

Others Spread Blame Around

¶12. (C) Former Ambassador to Iraq Bassam Kakish saw both sides to the conflict as having a vested interest in the violent escalation. On one side, he saw the government (and its internal and external backers) raising the ante to make the case that Lebanon needed an end to the stalemate over the empty president's chair. He highlighted the lack of a strong and quick international reaction, and compared it to what he saw as the silence of the world throughout Israel's

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occupation of Southern Lebanon for nearly 20 years. Kakish thought Hizballah, for its part, was trying to prevent any president being appointed that it rejected. Independently echoing Royal Court Chief Awadallah's comments, Kakish said that ultimately the best way to defang Hizballah would be for Israel to "return" the Sheba'a Farms to Lebanon, on the grounds that doing so would remove any excuse within Lebanon for Hizballah's continued role as an armed militia. "There will be no reasons for anyone to argue that it is occupied land."

¶13. (C) MP Ali Dalaeen, a tribal intellectual from Karak, is of two minds when it comes to the Lebanon issue. He worries about Hizballah's revolutionary credentials and the impact they could have on the region. Yet at the same time, he thinks that in the absence of a workable alternative, the West is using a double standard - one in which the right of the government to bear arms trumps the right of Hizballah to defend its point of view through armed conflict. Dalaeen spreads the blame for the situation around. Syria is to blame for "some aspects," but Iran, Israel, "small interests within the Lebanese government," Europe, and of course the U.S. all combined to create the current situation. "I blame the Arabs. They need to intervene. We need to push the Lebanese government to elect a President so Hizballah won't

have an excuse."

¶14. (C) Soufian Al-Hassan, Director of Research in parliament, believes that Jordan should continue to sit on the sidelines of the Lebanon conflict. "Jordan doesn't have any cards to play there," he says. Hassan called what he saw as the King's refusal to take a firm stand on the issue as "very wise," and believes that future Arab League meetings on Lebanon will be similarly divided and ultimately ineffective.

Even so, Hassan sees larger forces at work, and believes that the deteriorating situation in Lebanon is being orchestrated from Washington.

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